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On Foreign Soil: Immigrants and the Past in Victorian Britain

Anna Vaninskaya*

ABSTRACT

The essay examines immigrant perceptions and constructions of the past in Victorian Britain. It takes into account memorial practices and historical discourses from across a range of national, political and professional backgrounds, in order to highlight the points of conjunction between communities and cultural figures rarely, if ever, brought together in Victorian scholarship. To do this, it adopts a dual methodology, combining historical and biographical overviews drawn from different disciplinary areas with close attention to primary textual examples. Case studies of European revolutionaries such as Alexander Herzen, Peter Kropotkin and Karl Marx, and American expatriate authors such as Henry James and Mark Twain, are thus situated in a broader analysis of the production and consumption of private and public histories, inflected by considerations of ideology, degrees of integration and types of relation to the 'host' society. The foreigners who found themselves on British soil in the Victorian period created a web of relationships with memory and history, and only by engaging with the breadth and variety, as well as the specificity, of those relationships, can we begin to unravel the web's complexity. The essay takes the 'global turn' in Victorian studies in a different direction, and may be read as the first step towards a new theory of the Victorian immigrant experience of the past, based on an interrogation of the memory/history binary itself.

KEYWORDS: immigration; past; history; memory; Alexander Herzen; Peter Kropotkin; Karl Marx; Henry James; Mark Twain

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1. VARIETIES OF PAST EXPERIENCE

‘Migration’ is a word that conceals a complex medley of motivations and outcomes, of physical and mental journeys as diverse as the people who undertake them. Millions of emigrants left Britain during the Victorian period, but just as they were embarking on a life abroad, hundreds of thousands of immigrants were disembarking, for Britain was their final destination. Some stayed permanently; others were transient: for them Britain proved only a temporary staging post on the way to other countries across the seas, or back home. This essay concerns itself with the experiences and constructions of the past of both long-term and short-term migrants *to* Britain, and thus takes the ‘global turn’ in Victorian studies back full circle to the point of origin. The aim is to bring together for comparison the discourses and practices of communities and individual immigrants from different backgrounds and from across the span of Victoria’s reign, in order to examine the unexpected synergies that can be generated from their juxtaposition. This kind of lateral rather than vertical approach, which dispenses with established historiographical silos and puts side by side Russian revolutionaries in London, German scholars in Oxford and American artists in the Cotswolds, is intended to show the advantages of breadth as well as depth, narrative as well as analysis, in thinking about Victorian immigrant conceptions of the past.

The essay adapts two terms from migration studies – ‘memory’ and ‘history’ – in order to organise its account of the variety of pasts constructed across national, political, professional and generational lines by foreigners who found themselves on British soil.¹ For the purposes of

¹ See Kathy Burrell and Panikos Panayi, eds, *Histories and Memories: Migrants and their History in Britain* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2006) for an explication of these two paradigms; and Irial Glynn and J. Olaf Kleist, eds, *History, Memory and Migration: Perceptions of the Past and the Politics of Incorporation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) for a more recent overview of the fruitful intersection between migration studies and memory studies. Both of these fields are vast, and no attempt is made here to catalogue the existing literature on migration, memory, nostalgia, national belonging, (Victorian British) representations of the past, or the terms used in the essay (migrant,

this account, ‘memory’ will be defined as an emotionally driven clinging to the personal fragments of a past that constitutes identity; ‘history’ as the (supposedly) scientific observation of structural forces, the study and classification of data, and the formulation of official and public narratives and images. In the ‘memory’ paradigm, the past appears as an endangered language to be preserved at all costs; in the ‘history’ paradigm it is perceived as a dead script to be deciphered or revived.

The sections that follow demonstrate the undoubted usefulness of such notional oppositions, as well as their ultimate insufficiency. For it goes without saying that public and private are frequently inextricable, that official narratives are routinely employed in the formation of personal identities, and scholarly constructions imbued with emotional valence, that individual memories are collectively reinforced and continually revised, while nostalgic backward glances and salvage operations serve the purpose of political, professional or commercial advancement in new surroundings. Neither is the ostensible object of attachment or study fixed and stable: Victorian foreigners had their own pasts to deal with, but they could also engage with the past of their host country, or the pasts of other peoples. And even these seemingly straightforward distinctions could become problematic for British imperial subjects and former colonials from the USA: was the British past their own or not? The following discussion traces the complex interweaving of all these strands by picking out from the multiplicity of immigrant acts of past-production and past-consumption a few that fruitfully highlight the points of conjunction between communities and cultural figures hitherto unconnected in Victorian scholarship. The essay is based on the premise that it is both legitimate and valuable to attempt to theorize the

immigrant, *émigré*, exile, refugee, expatriate), each of which has its own history. For a start, see Caroline Emily Shaw, ‘The British, Persecuted Foreigners and the Emergence of the Refugee Category in Nineteenth-Century Britain’, *Immigrants and Minorities: Historical Studies in Ethnicity, Migration and Diaspora*, 30.2-3 (2012), 239–62, and Tony Kushner, *Remembering Refugees: Then and Now* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

Victorian immigrant experience as such, or more precisely, that amidst the tremendous variety, it is possible to discern a constellation of relationships with the past that only begins to emerge when that variety is given its due.

Nevertheless, it is important to identify at the outset what the essay does not aim to do. No claim is made that the particular case studies gathered together here are in themselves representative in either national, occupational or gender terms. The individuals whose private reflections, public pronouncements or life trajectories are given most attention in the following pages: people such as Alexander Herzen and Peter Kropotkin, Karl Marx, Henry James and Mark Twain, were, for the most part, members of a social or intellectual elite. Such individuals had money or position, or – if indigent – at least an education and an audience, and left behind an extensive archive of their engagements with the past. The essay does not attempt to do justice to the unwritten stories of the majority, nor even to the autonomous experiences of the female members of that social and intellectual elite. The few women who figure briefly in this essay appear mainly as observers of the male condition. Nevertheless, enough variety is compassed here to draw some tentative general conclusions about immigrant memorial practices and historical discourses during Victoria's reign, especially as these were inflected by ideology, degrees of integration and types of relation to the 'host' society.

Much remains to be written about the production and consumption of private and public histories by male and female refugees, political militants and exiles seeking asylum, poor labourers and artisans in search of a better life, foreign clerks, butchers, peddlers, sailors, shopkeepers, itinerant musicians, financiers, industrialists, aristocrats, students and writers of the Victorian period. There is, of course, no such thing as a typical or collective immigrant experience, and none of the voices reproduced here speak for all. But immigrant *experiences* (plural) of the past are susceptible to analysis and categorization, and this essay argues that it is only by putting those experiences into historiographically unusual juxtapositions that we can unlock new potential in the old memory/history binary.

2. 'ALWAYS LOOKING BACK': MEMORIES OF THE OTHER SHORE²

The individual men (mostly) who form the subject of this essay were the visible tip of an iceberg whose enormous base, submerged in the social waters of Victorian Britain, was compounded of hundreds of thousands of Irish navvies and costermongers, sweated Jewish piece-workers, Italian organ-grinders and representatives of countless other nationalities both from the Empire and beyond. A brief national overview is necessary to introduce a sense of proportion. The Irish, though technically internal (to the United Kingdom) migrants, were by far the largest group to come by boat. The second largest wave broke after 1880 with the arrival of refugees from the Russian empire, many – but by no means all – of them Jews fleeing pogroms. The class profile of these two groups was not calculated to endear them to the local population: most were poor – exploited and reviled as cheap labour. Until the 'Russians' arrived in the late nineteenth century, German economic migrants formed the largest minority from Continental Europe, with other Europeans, such as the French and the Italians, bringing up the rear. Though in cultural terms their footprint was just as large, non-Europeans were less prominent numerically. The Chinese were mainly found in the port cities, as were the lascars (or seamen) from various parts of Asia; there were white Americans of all sorts and conditions, Indian students, businessmen and princes, as well as black immigrants from Africa, the West Indies and the United States of America.

A very rich historiography has developed to describe the national community structures that these immigrant groups established in nineteenth-century Britain, as the Victorians

² A. I. Herzen, *Byloe I Dumy*, 2 vols (Minsk: Gosudarstvennoe Uchebno-Pedagogicheskoe Izdatel'stvo, 1957), II, p.

78. All translations from Herzen are my own. *From the Other Shore* (1850) is the title of Herzen's disillusioned book of essays on the failure of the 1848 revolutions that sets out his philosophy of history. See also John Slatter, ed., *From the Other Shore: Russian Political Emigrants in Britain, 1880–1917* (London: Frank Cass, 1984).

themselves were fully aware.³ Many such communities attempted to subsist as transplants in a foreign soil by recreating the micro-climate of their land of origin. They preserved the past life as a kind of artificial oasis in an alien environment, a bubble of memory separate from the surrounding reality – separate from the present (and ultimately, through eventual assimilation and integration, the future) represented by the ‘host’ society. Many of the cultural, political and religious networks and organisations created by foreigners in Britain – the restaurants, clubs, libraries, and newspapers no less than the churches, schools, hospitals and lodging houses – served the purely practical purpose of mutual support and survival. But in doing so they also mimicked the institutions the immigrants had left behind: like Noah’s arks, they carried the remnants of the past into the future world. They functioned as replicas of the Old Country, within which the old language was spoken and written, old class and political antagonisms persisted, and the familiar associations of the old life were maintained. And underlying their recreation of a lost life was what Burrell and Panayi call the potent immigrant ‘myth of return.’ For Jews *goles* [exile] was not just a recent personal but a historical condition; and with the first Pan-African conference held in London in 1900, the ‘Back to Africa’ campaign was put squarely on the agenda of black activists. To return home – whether to a romanticized Africa or *Eretz Yisrael*, or to a very real city or village in Italy or Germany – was almost always to return to the

³ See e.g. George R. Sims, ed., *Living London: Its Work and Its Play, Its Humour and Its Pathos, Its Sights and Its Scenes*, 3 vols. (London: Cassell, 1902–03) for a contemporary account of the immigrant make up of London at the turn of the twentieth century. For Victorian immigration generally see Robert Windler, *Bloody Foreigners: The Story of Immigration to Britain* (London: Little, Brown, 2004); Colin Holmes, ed., *Immigrants and Minorities in British Society* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978) and *John Bull’s Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871–1971* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988); Panikos Panayi, *Immigration, Ethnicity and Racism in Britain, 1815–1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994). Where no specific source is cited for immigrant biographical information, the *Dictionary of National Biography* can be consulted.

past. A migrant who had travelled to Britain in space was also a mental traveller in time, but one for whom the present rather than the past was a foreign country.

It was not just economic migrants or religious refugees who tended to form closed, past-fixated communities, isolated linguistically, geographically and culturally from the 'host' society. So too did some of the stateless political *émigrés* in self-imposed or forced exile – from the Poles and Italians of the 1820s and 30s to the flotsam of the 1848 revolutions and the various failed European national and political uprisings. Increasingly distant from reality back home, but unintegrated into the reality that surrounded them, they lived in what some contemporaries regarded as a fantasy world of their own making. E.H. Carr's classic *The Romantic Exiles* draws to a close with an affecting and tragic portrait of Nicholas Ogarev, the Russian aristocrat, poet and revolutionary who spent his last days as a broken-down alcoholic in a flea-ridden house in Greenwich, tended by a former prostitute, the working-class cockney Mary Sutherland. His last – rare – visitors encountered an 'empty husk' of a man surrounded by relics of the past: an oil painting of himself when young, a bust, some photographs of his friends, now scattered or dead – the former luminaries of European revolution. 'He talked often and incoherently of his own country and the days of his youth.'⁴ There were many such Ogarevs, of various nationalities, living out the fag ends of their lives in the back streets of dingy London suburbs, or in the foreigner ghettos of Soho and Leicester Square. For them Britain was not an imperial centre but a far-away place of exile, a Siberia of the soul, the end-point – mutely uncomprehending and blindly indifferent – of lives lived in other worlds, under different skies. What the narratives of such exiles share is the notion of a final and irrevocable break with the past: a loss not only of public status, but of personal meaning. The end of a historical epoch coincides with – and frequently brings about – the end of one's biography. The rest is an

⁴ E. H. Carr, *The Romantic Exiles: A Nineteenth-Century Portrait Gallery*, 1933 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1949), p. 6.

epilogue. Life is shattered in two and the *émigré* is stranded, helplessly watching ‘from the other shore’ as the continent of his former existence drifts away, further and further, into the past.

This was the condition of many exiles from the failed 1848 revolutions, who found themselves, mostly through no choice of their own, in foggy London, pouring out their hearts in letters home full of homesickness, mourning, and nostalgia. Their situation curiously paralleled that of the Royalist refugees from the 1789 French Revolution (their opposite numbers in ideological terms), who often resorted to the metaphor of the shipwreck to describe their fate.⁵ The language remained unchanged sixty years later. ‘We write from the depths of exile,’ announced the first 1853 issue of the Jersey-based French newspaper-in-exile *L’Homme*, ‘from between two waves, like the shipwrecked.’⁶ The composer Hector Berlioz, visiting London in 1848, thanked Charles Hallé, the exiled German conductor and later founder of the Hallé Orchestra, ‘for having come to this house so soon after your shipwreck on the coast of England.’⁷ Johanna Kinkel, the wife of Gottfried Kinkel, a German revolutionary art history professor, wrote in a letter of 1851: ‘We are in a condition like that after a great shipwreck; each one of us grabs a plank and entrusts himself to the waves.’⁸ Watery images abound in exile writing. The Russian literary critic Pavel Annenkov described the Russian *émigré* as ‘living like an amphibian between two worlds – the Western and Russian worlds’: a state that could not last

⁵ Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 73.

⁶ Charles Ribeyrolles, ‘Solidarité’, *L’Homme* 1, 30 November 1853, 1–2 (p. 2). My translation.

⁷ Quoted in Rosemary Ashton, *Little Germany: Exile and Asylum in Victorian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 178.

⁸ Quoted in Ashton, *Little Germany*, p. 21.

forever, he believed, because eventually a choice had to be made.⁹ But for some people it did last forever. They were, like the speaker of Matthew Arnold's 'Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse':

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest [their] head.¹⁰

Arnold's poem was published in 1855, precisely when all those European *émigrés* were dragging out their liminal existences in the interstices of British society, at home neither in the old world nor in the land of exile, ghosts endlessly replaying their last moments of life, stuck in the past while the streams of time flowed by. In 1854 Johanna Kinkel wrote: 'Would you believe it? – there are still clubs of Continental refugees [...] sitting around here, not mixing at all with the English, but just carrying on among themselves the squabbles about 1849.'¹¹ Or as Alexander Herzen, the Russian socialist exile and perceptive chronicler of the refugee experience, described the same people:

And not a step forward. Like the court clock at Versailles, they
always show the same hour, the hour when the king died... and
like the Versailles clock, they have not been rewound since the
death of Louis XV. They point to one event, the one passing of
some one event; they talk of it, they think of it, they return to it
again and again. Meeting the same people, the same groups after
five or six months, after two or three years, one becomes
frightened: the same arguments are still going on, the same

⁹ Quoted in Martin A. Miller, *The Russian Revolutionary Emigrés, 1825–1870* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 25.

¹⁰ Matthew Arnold, 'Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse', in *Matthew Arnold*, eds. by Miriam Allott and Robert H. Super (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 159–65 (p. 161).

¹¹ Quoted in Ashton, *Little Germany*, p. 188.

personalities and recriminations, only there are more wrinkles cut by poverty and deprivation; the jackets and overcoats have been worn through; there are more grey hairs, and everyone together is older, bonier, gloomier... But the speeches are still the same! [...] They have no objective aim, all the parties are stubbornly conservative, to move forward seems to them a weakness, almost a desertion [...] Years pass in this way: gradually everything changes around them [...] They do not notice anything. Some exits have collapsed and been blocked up – but they keep knocking at them; new cracks have opened, bands of light are bursting through them, but they look away.¹²

Herzen was a particularly shrewd observer of the condition of exile as psychological ‘ossification.’ Exile, he wrote, ‘checks development and pulls people away from a living activity into a spectral one. Quitting their motherland [...] with the constant thought of going back tomorrow, people do not move forward, but keep returning to the past.’ They cannot leave behind ‘the questions, thoughts and memories which form an obligatory, oppressive tradition [...] All *émigrés*, cut off from the living environment to which they used to belong, close their eyes so as not to see the bitter truth, and become habituated more and more to a fantastical vicious circle consisting of stagnant memories and unfulfilled hopes.’ Like Dickens’s Miss Havisham, they ‘fixated on their unexpected days of triumph and refused to take off the withered wreaths, the nuptial attire, even though it was not the *bride* who had betrayed.’¹³

This dwelling on days of triumph was quickly turned into a formal activity, for the ‘crisis of memory is the precondition underlying [...] obsession with recollection and

¹² Herzen, *Byloe*, II: pp. 238–9.

¹³ Herzen, *Byloe*, II, pp. 36, 78.

commemoration.’¹⁴ And nothing was commemorated with more fervour in the 1850s than the glories of the recent revolutionary past, which in the absence of new triumphs grew ever more tarnished as the years went by. When the German-Jewish writer Fanny Lewald attended a lecture on the history of socialism given by the exiled French socialist leader Louis Blanc in a ‘charity school-room near Oxford Street,’ she observed, in typically Herzenesque fashion:¹⁵

A lamp hung from the low ceiling of the apartment, at whose further extremity red flags, with the words ‘*fraternité, égalité, liberté*,’ inscribed upon them, were fixed against the wall. Above these, between two red Phrygian caps, was a smaller banner, with the inscription – *Second anniversaire de la revolution du 24 Fevrier*. But the banner was torn or twisted, so that one had to guess part of the words. Ragged, full of stains, and adorned with withered laurels, the whole trophy had a painfully unpleasing effect in that desolate and [...] unclean apartment, from whose walls and ceiling the paper hung in tatters. [...] The room had a damp and musty smell when we entered it.¹⁶

But though decaying like Miss Havisham’s cake, the past had to be kept on life-support, and the French revolutionary press-in-exile took it upon itself to inform its readership of festivals and banquets commemorating the February revolution, and of refugee funerals accompanied by

¹⁴ Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present*, p. 60.

¹⁵ [Frederick Hardman], ‘The London Diary of a German Authoress’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 70, August 1851, 209–220 (p. 215).

¹⁶ Lewald quoted in Hardman, ‘London Diary’, p. 214.

speeches about the resilience of the cause ‘even through death.’¹⁷ Acts of commemoration and pilgrimages to dusty shrines were designed to keep up morale in an unpropitious climate, and the French were by no means the first to indulge in such official rituals. They had learned from the Poles who had already spent a few decades in the country, and whose ‘meetings celebrating the anniversaries of the Polish Revolution served as models for the French anniversaries of the February revolution of 1848.’¹⁸ Nor were they the last. In the latter part of the Victorian period international anarchist and socialist exiles continued to hold annual meetings to commemorate 1848 and then the Paris Commune of 1871. Commune anniversaries, in particular, featured mixed rosters of French and Russian-Jewish-American anarchist leaders, including such celebrities as Prince Peter Kropotkin.

But by the 1880s and 90s, after the majority of Communard refugees had returned to France, and long after the 48ers had dispersed as a community (some back to Europe, others into British life, and others to their graves), most of those wishing to invoke a revolutionary tradition were no longer in a position to turn to a personal past. Instead, they had to draw on a range of generally available historical examples. Covering the 1889 demonstration by Jewish unemployed immigrants in the East End, which was followed by strikes of immigrant tailors, the Yiddish-language anarchist paper *Arbeter Fraint* duly noted that it was ‘the hundredth anniversary of the Great French Revolution’; and in the following decade Kropotkin spent time in the British Museum researching for a large study of that century-old upheaval.¹⁹ This was impersonal history, not collectively reinforced and formalized individual memory.

¹⁷ Bernard Porter, *The Refugee Question in Mid-Victorian Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 26; see also Sylvie Aprile, ‘Voices from Exile: French Newspapers in England’, in *Exiles from European Revolutions: Refugees in Mid-Victorian England*, ed. by Sabine Freitag (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2003), pp. 149–63 (p. 153).

¹⁸ Aprile, ‘Voices from Exile’, p. 158.

¹⁹ Quoted in William Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals, 1875–1914* (London: Duckworth, 1975), p. 184.

The difference had always been palpable in commemorations designed to exhibit an older cultural rather than a recent political past. In 1859, Gottfried Kinkel, the poet Ferdinand Freiligrath and the journalist Karl Blind arranged a festival at the Crystal Palace to celebrate the centenary of the German playwright and philosopher Friedrich Schiller. Kinkel's speech at the Palace may have been 'all in German,' as the *Punch* journalists in attendance wryly remarked, but this was not a funeral oration aimed at a community of refugee mourners.²⁰ The organisers had one eye on the British audience, and their semi-outward-facing festival gave an inkling of all those Irish Exhibitions and Russian Bazaars that would be arranged in years to come by integrated immigrants eager to showcase a sanitised version of their national pasts and presents to the British public.²¹ In the same way, the fairly high-profile Commune anniversaries of the 1880s and 90s, which benefited from close involvement by prominent British socialists and were held in venues such as the South Place Institute, were quite different affairs from the gatherings of 'five or six dozen seedy exiles' in musty rooms with tattered banners described by *Blackwood's*.²²

The inevitable passage of time always blurs the lines between memory and history, but another and equally important factor was also in play in this second type of commemoration. As early as 1855, the anniversary celebrations for the February revolution were already being held at St Martin's Hall, organised by an international committee of Chartists and exiles headed by Ernest Jones. For as soon as bridges were built with the 'host' society, the memory of some could become the history of others. Indeed, memory presented for outside consumption rather than in the service of the preservation rituals of introverted communities does not fit easily into

²⁰ 'The Schiller Centenary', *Punch*, 19 November 1859, 203–204 (p. 203).

²¹ On the bazaars see John Slatter, 'Jaakoff Prelooker and *The Anglo-Russian*', in Slatter, *From the Other Shore*, pp. 49–66.

²² Hardman, 'London Diary', p. 215.

the ‘island of nostalgia’ model of the migrant experience of *le temps perdu*. Neither does it fit into the typical narrative about victims of arrested development, fixated on loss and dispossession, presented in the memoirs and letters of exiled observers. The replacement of memory by history seems to correlate, therefore, not just with temporal distance but with the immigrant’s degree of integration.²³ To what extent this is the case is worth considering at length, and one may begin by comparing two left-wing exiles from Tsarist oppression, Herzen and Kropotkin.

3. THE INTEGRATION NARRATIVE

The highborn socialist and the anarchist prince who made the suburbs of London their temporary home in the mid and late nineteenth century respectively now rank as the two most famous Russian political exiles of the Victorian period. Both Herzen and Kropotkin were globetrotters, eternal migrants and cosmopolitan polyglots, thoroughly international in outlook. They thought and wrote with all of Europe in mind, while snugly ensconced in Bromley or Primrose Hill. Like other exiles, they found in Britain a refuge – an economically pitiless and apathetic, though liberal and peaceful, haven from the political *Sturm und Drang*, the prisons and gendarmeries of Continental Europe. Both were authors of memoirs and works of political commentary, founders and editors of radical newspapers, friends and acquaintances of the leading national liberators and revolutionaries. And both were intensely concerned with the nature of history. But they approached the past in very different ways, and it is tempting to see the roots of this difference in the contrasting nature of their interactions with Britain. If the ‘memory’ model of which Herzen is an iconic representative is predicated, to a certain extent, on

²³ Both were clearly in play when in 1871 the Russian novelist Ivan Turgenev was asked to commemorate the Scottish past by giving a speech (in English) at the Walter Scott centenary celebrations in Edinburgh. Though Turgenev – a frequent visitor to Britain from the 1840s – was not a migrant, his English was excellent, and he was lionised in high society throughout the Victorian period. See Patrick Waddington, *Turgenev and England* (London: Macmillan Press, 1980), pp. 208–214.

the failure of integration, Kropotkin the public 'historian' may be accounted an integration success.

Herzen dedicated his years in London to the free Russian press. Despite his acquaintance with Robert Owen, Thomas Carlyle, and Joseph Cowen, despite his engagement with the ideas of J.S. Mill and other contemporary British thinkers, despite the warm reception by the British press of the translation of the first volume of his memoir – it was to Russia that Herzen's eyes were turned, in Russia that he hoped to make (and did make) an impact. Perhaps ironically for an ideological Westerniser living abroad, it was Russian history and the fate of Russian society that preoccupied him to the last. His predicament was that of the revolutionary *émigré* hero of Sergei Stepniak's novel *The Career of a Nihilist* (1889), whose body was in Geneva, but whose 'heart and soul were filled with Russian cares, Russian aspirations, and Russian recollections.'²⁴ Herzen was *in* Britain, but he was not *of* it: as has been seen, his natural milieu were the European refugee circles he described in such detail in the autobiography *My Past and Thoughts* [*Byloe i Dumy*] – in so much more detail, one should note, than the 'host' British society which gave them all asylum. When he moved on to Geneva and elsewhere, the footprint he left in British soil quickly faded. It is in Russian rather than British intellectual history that he keeps his rightful place, and it is significant that unlike Kropotkin and Stepniak (another famous exile of the next generation who – despite his terrorist past – assimilated much more successfully in Britain than Herzen ever did), he almost never wrote in English for a British audience.

For Kropotkin too, Britain was neither the first nor the last stop in a journey that eventually led back to revolutionary Russia. But while he was there, he turned native, for having quit Russia he knew that his field of endeavour would henceforth be in Western Europe. He worked for *Nature*; he rubbed shoulders on the lecture circuit with William Morris and George Bernard Shaw; he spoke to Durham miners and Newcastle workers; he wrote letters to *The Times*

²⁴ Sergei Stepniak, *The Career of a Nihilist: A Novel* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1889), p. 14.

and contributed pieces to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and to the major periodicals. And Britain returned the favour, taking him to its bosom with almost universal admiration and respect. When he came to compose the *Nineteenth Century* articles (1890–96) which were republished as *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* by William Heinemann in 1902, it was, unsurprisingly, British debates he weighed in on.²⁵ Charles Darwin, T. H. Huxley, H. W. Bates, Herbert Spencer, John Lubbock, Henry Maine, Frederic Seebohm, and other British historians, anthropologists and naturalists were his textual interlocutors. Though he incorporated the findings of Russian ethnography and zoology, Kropotkin still used the language and traded in the ideas that would have been familiar to the educated British public which was his primary audience.²⁶ He belonged, and belongs to this day, to the intellectual history of Western Europe.

In the British chapters of *My Past and Thoughts*, much of which was written in London in the 1850s, Herzen left to posterity a self-portrait of the author as pessimist and cynic, reflecting bitterly and ironically on the fate of movements and individuals, on the erosion and destruction wreaked by time. Kropotkin, on the other hand, writing in *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (1899) and in *Mutual Aid*, proclaimed optimistically the necessity of looking always on the bright side of life, of emphasizing the positive developments, the victories, the happy endings, the successful struggles and the tenacious survivals, not the streams running into the sand. The difference in outlook is apparent even in the titles of their most famous works: tellingly, a memoir (*My Past*) and a series of research articles (*Mutual Aid*). On Herzen's side, there is the promise of a private, personal meditation on things gone by: in the original Russian 'byloe' [past] is not qualified by a possessive pronoun, and implies not just Herzen's own past but all that has departed, the snows of

²⁵ Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*, 1902 (London: William Heinemann, 1915).

²⁶ Kropotkin traced mutual aid and collectivism through the phases of barbarian communal agriculture, the village community and the anti-feudal medieval city, and celebrated the survival of cooperative activity among the working classes despite the rise of individualism and the statism of centralised monarchies. In most respects this narrative was a carbon copy of that being popularised by William Morris and other British Marxists at the same time.

yesteryear. Kropotkin, on the other hand, offers a publicly detached, though ideologically inflected, ‘scientific’ analysis of the process of development (‘A Factor of Evolution’) – moving forward rather than looking back. And what one finds inside the two books reflects what one first encounters on their covers: deeply felt stories of European individuals and their aspirations, political dreams of the 1790s and social hopes of the 1840s, in various stages of disintegration on British soil – versus a panorama-like overview of the stages of human development rooted in the Victorian discourses of anthropology, medieval historiography, and political economy, and written in the style familiar from countless scholarly treatises. Two different cultural conversations with different participants, two genres, two languages, two timescales, two modes of historical presentation – as personal tragicomedy or as idealistic grand narrative: no better shorthand for the ‘memory’ and ‘history’ paradigms can be found. And the foregoing account would seem to imply that the adoption of such differing perspectives was simply a function of the migrant’s position *vis à vis* the ‘host’ society.

4. MOVING FORWARD: CONSTRUCTING PUBLIC HISTORIES

But like all simple explanations, the integration narrative is deceptive. It is not just that a number of other factors may help to explain the difference between Herzen and Kropotkin specifically,²⁷ but that the explanation also fails in its general applicability. Rudolf Rocker – the German leader of East End ‘Russian’-Jewish trade unionism and anarchism from the mid-1890s, who came to London by way of France – did not possess Kropotkin’s social advantages, or Kropotkin’s international English-language audience. His essays were in Yiddish, but like Kropotkin, and numerous other active revolutionaries of different degrees of assimilation who used the past

²⁷ Kropotkin did not experience as many personal tragedies as Herzen had, was not writing in the immediate aftermath of failed revolutions, was of a different ideological persuasion, and had the luxury of a British audience that was much readier to receive what he had to offer given the changed political outlook of the *fin de siècle*.

primarily as a tool in the struggle for social transformation, he eschewed lament in favour of something more instrumental – in his case, libertarian critiques of Marxist historical materialism.²⁸ He may have inhabited the cultural ‘bubble’ of London Jewish anarchism, but that bubble not only had impressive international connections, but consciously devoted itself to constructing new public histories instead of commemorating superseded pasts. And the impulse to construct such histories acknowledged no ideological boundaries, just as it failed to correlate in many cases with the migrant’s ability or opportunity to integrate. Kropotkin and Rocker may have been anarchists, but Karl Marx, the anarchists’ enemy, is an equally telling case in point.

Marx was a contemporary of Herzen’s and just as much of an ‘outsider’ in British society as the exiles Herzen wrote about, but according to Rosemary Ashton, he never expressed nostalgia for his past life and the lost *heimat* that his revolutionary compatriots in London bewailed at every opportunity.²⁹ Yet in *Capital* he produced what was probably the greatest engagement with history of any immigrant on British soil. The forward-looking orientation of such work was its most conspicuous quality – as Marx underlined in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: ‘The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future.’ Observing the same groups of refugees as Herzen, he arrived at the same conclusion: ‘From 1848 to 1851, only the ghost of the old revolution circulated.’ And his famous critique of the past-obsession of the failed French revolution explicitly compared the public political predicament to the personal linguistic one that was familiar to every *émigré* wintering in London in 1852:

The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on
the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with
[...] creating something that did not exist before [...] they

²⁸ See Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals*.

²⁹ Ashton, *Little Germany*, p. 97.

anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service,
borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in
order to present this new scene in world history in time-honoured
disguise and borrowed language [...] In like manner, the beginner
who has learned a new language always translates it back into his
mother tongue, but he assimilates the spirit of the new language
and expresses himself freely in it only when he moves in it
without recalling the old and when he forgets his native tongue.³⁰

Marx may have been speaking figuratively here, but literally, as well, he was no elegist of the old mother tongue and all it stood for. There was to be no meditation on *'byloë'* for him, no memoir mode of thought; he would not exclaim with the article in *L'Homme*: *'The gods are departing'*, said the dying ancient world [...] and the betrayed Revolution can say in its turn, *the men are departing!*³¹ '[L]et the dead bury their dead' was Marx's Biblical response to those who looked to the past instead of proclaiming the future kingdom of God. The coming revolution had to 'arrive at its own content.'³² To cast off the cultural comfort blanket of the past, to let the endangered language go extinct and to create something genuinely new in its place was the purpose of political action and the only proper use of history. In order to make history the revolutionary would have to master its laws, and to avoid at all costs becoming mired in nostalgic memories.

It is crucial to emphasise that the study and teaching of history were central not just to the Marxist ideological project, but to the projects of all types of politically conscious immigrants invested in forging an alternative future, from Irish nationalists to Indian anti-colonial activists.

³⁰ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in *Marx and Engels Internet Archive*

<<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm>> [accessed 8 December 2017].

³¹ Ribeyrolles, 'Solidarité', p. 1; my translation.

³² Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire*.

Their methods were as various as the contexts from which they hailed and the ideologies to which they subscribed, and by no means all of them concurred with Marx's proscription of revivalism (literary and linguistic revivalism played a seminal part in London-based Irish nationalism, for instance), but all co-opted the past for forward-looking rather than (or in addition to) memorial ends. They did not dwell, like at least some of the 48ers, on its irretrievability, on disruption and discontinuity, but actively reshaped it for the practical advancement of their political causes.

Some of these, unlike Marx, but like both Herzen and Kropotkin, made a stop in Britain and then moved on – leaves before the winds of history, cosmopolitans whether by choice or perforce.³³ The Russian Jew Aaron Lieberman, in London briefly in the late 1870s before migrating onwards to America, founded the working-class Hebrew Socialist Union – one of the first Jewish socialist organisations in the world. Its meetings featured lectures on topics such as the development of human society, medieval guilds and their opposition to the nobility, eighteenth-century French philosophy and the economic causes of the French Revolution, the rise of trade unions, and the effects of the industrial revolution.³⁴ This was an instrumental history formulated to provide practical lessons and an intellectual framework for the class struggle.

In national or anti-colonial struggles history also became a battleground, as old, especially British, constructions were challenged and new ones brought in to replace them. The exiled republican nationalist leader (and practical cosmopolitan) Giuseppe Mazzini, whose dream

³³ Typical anarchists of the late Victorian period, such as Kropotkin's and Rocker's Georgian colleague Varlam Cherkezov, who contributed history articles to the English-language anarchist paper *Freedom*, were the quintessential people without borders. For many of them London was just one node in a complicated international itinerary that could stretch from Europe and the Near East to North and South America.

³⁴ On Lieberman see Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals*, and Mikhail Parkhomovskii and A. B. Rogachevskii, eds, *Russkie Evrei v Velikobritanii* (Jerusalem: Nauchno-issledovatel'skii Tsentr 'Russkoe Evrei'stvo v Zarubezh'e', 2000).

was to create a living and united ‘Young Italy,’ put to scorn the British poetic view of his country as ‘altogether dead, because the corpse of a nation is a beautiful image – and dead for ever, because eternity adds to the effect of the image.’³⁵ When he opened a free school for the Italian poor in London in the early 1840s, the ‘History of the Motherland’ was taught there to show that the dead could be revived.³⁶ Black immigrant public speakers and writers also aimed to correct the distortions of white British historiography and, even before the rise of the Pan-African movement, tried to offer appreciations of African cultural heritage and the achievements of ancient African civilisations.³⁷ From 1905, radicalised Indian students and intellectuals in Britain engaged head-on with British constructions of their history by introducing annual Martyrs’ Day celebrations to mark the anniversary of the 1857 Great Indian National Rising, a.k.a. the Indian Mutiny.³⁸ Mourning rituals could be transfigured into fighting ones, and the Indian past could become a rhetorical weapon in the hands of those who wished to challenge Britain’s role in the present. Dadabhai Naoroji – businessman, professor and MP, and probably the most significant figure in the Indian community in the Victorian period – condemned the British Raj, which drained millions from the Indian economy, by comparing its rule with that of ‘former invaders’ such as the Mughals.³⁹

But Britain could also serve as a model for emulation, its history mined for positive examples instead of its historiography condemned for its distortions. Earlier in the nineteenth

³⁵ Quoted in Lucio Sponza, *Italian Immigrants in Nineteenth-century Britain: Realities and Images* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1988), p. 131.

³⁶ Quoted in Burrell and Panayi, *Histories and Memories*, p. 61.

³⁷ See Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), pp. 272–94 on Pan-Africanism; also Hakim Adi, ‘African Political Thinkers, Pan-Africanism and the Politics of Exile, c.1850–1970’, in *Immigrants and Minorities*, pp. 263–91.

³⁸ Rozina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: Indians in Britain 1700–1947* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), p. 106.

³⁹ Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes*, p. 80.

century, Anglophile liberal Italian *émigrés* who had read T. B. Macaulay's and Henry Hallam's constitutional histories and idealized the British political system, wrote books aimed at their Italian compatriots praising British institutions for fostering civic virtues and patriotism of the kind that supposedly characterized life in the medieval Italian cities.⁴⁰ Britain was 'a new Florence,' and by imitating it, the Italians could 'revive those original republican virtues which they had lost after centuries of despotic rule.'⁴¹ In the mid and late 1800s, the German Marxists concentrated on different aspects of British history to draw lessons for their current struggle, but for them as for the Italians it provided an indispensable point of reference. In the mid-Victorian period, the Bradford-based Marxist businessman Georg Weerth wrote essays for Marx's newspaper on British radicalism from the eighteenth century to the Chartists, and after Bismarck's anti-socialist laws were passed in 1878, London welcomed another wave of socialist leaders and journalists who made the history of British revolutionaries their specialty.⁴² In the 1890s, the revisionist Marxist Eduard Bernstein settled into the British Museum to study the Diggers, the Levellers, and other radical movements of the seventeenth century, and discovered Gerrard Winstanley as a communist thinker. His work was published in German as part of a history of socialism, and he was succeeded in the British Museum by another Marxist, Max Beer, who later published (again in German) the first comprehensive history of the British labour movement from the middle of the eighteenth century to the 1900s. They were both, of course,

⁴⁰ On Anglo-Italian cultural constructions see Maurizio Isabella, 'Italian Exiles and British Politics before and after 1848', in Freitag, *Exiles from European Revolutions*, pp. 59–87; Barbara Schaff, ed., *Exiles, Emigrés and Intermediaries: Anglo-Italian Cultural Transactions* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010); and Maura O'Connor, *The Romance of Italy and the English Imagination: Italy, the English Middle Class and Imaging the Nation in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1998).

⁴¹ Isabella, 'Italian Exiles', p. 64.

⁴² On the battles within German Marxist historiography in Britain see Ashton, *Little Germany*, pp. 71–9, 231–32 and James W. Hulse, *Revolutionists in London: A Study of Five Unorthodox Socialists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).

following in the monumental footsteps of Marx himself, and it goes without saying that Marxism would never have existed in the first place without the historical researches that Karl and his collaborator and patron Friedrich Engels conducted in Britain.

5. TEACHING THE 'NATIVES'

Though German Marxists such as Bernstein and Beer made British history their own, they had very little impact – like Marx himself – on ‘native’ British history writing. Aside from cooperation with fellow British socialists, it was not part of their aim to break through the wall of foreignness, to gain intellectual status in British society, or to put down roots in order to affect that society’s understanding of the past.⁴³ Like Herzen’s, the main audiences of these Marxists were to be found abroad, but this did not mean that like the exiles of Herzen’s portrait, they were doomed to become wrecks stranded on Dover beach. They had no interest in elegizing the past as a repository of personal memory or in preserving the traditions of home for their own sake. In this sense they were more akin to the integrated foreign scholars who resided in Britain for professional reasons, attracted by the rich holdings of its libraries, than to their socialist precursors who mummified on unfamiliar soil. But what they could not or did not wish to do – mould both popular and disciplinary formulations of history in Britain itself – was accomplished by those migrants who managed to become active members of the Victorian cultural and academic establishment. And among those who acquired enough influence to teach their British hosts about the past of the world and their place in it, many had no interest in political transformation at all, being driven primarily by professional or economic motives.

⁴³ In this they differed from those Russian revolutionaries operating out of London in the 1880s and 90s who aimed their historical surveys directly at the British public, such as Stepniak in *Russia Under the Tsars* (1885), which was originally published in the form of articles in *The Times* and other British periodicals.

The most iconic of these distinctly un-radical history-makers was Friedrich Max Müller, the Oxford-based philologist and Sanskritist, and one of a number of German Orientalists in Victorian academia.⁴⁴ But Müller was much more than a jobbing academic: he was a renowned public intellectual who reigned over the Victorian disciplines of comparative philology and mythology. His lectures on the science of language and on comparative religion, at venues such as the Royal Institution and Westminster Abbey, drew crowds. He had originally come to Britain on a flying trip in 1846 to consult manuscripts at the East India Company library for his planned edition of the *Rig Veda*, and ended up staying for life. He was present in Paris during the 1848 revolution, but on a research trip rather than as a fighter, and on his return to Britain, instead of drowning in anonymity in the slums of London like his compatriot exiles, or scraping a living as a peripatetic lecturer in German art and history, like Kinkel, he went from triumph to triumph at Oxford. He published monographs on ancient Sanskrit literature and Hindu philosophy; he edited the monumental *Sacred Books of the East* series; and in 1886 he founded the English Goethe Society. His public success was enormous, and though many of his theories were discredited in academic circles by the end of the century, almost no branch of the Victorian humanities and social sciences remained untouched by his influence.

Though few could attain Müller's pitch of public recognition, many still managed to become highly respected members of the British academic establishment. Oxford and Cambridge, for instance, each had their resident Icander, and the Victorian discovery of the Old North was due in no small part to their efforts. Guðbrandur Vigfússon had already forged a stellar career as a scholar of Icelandic literature when he was persuaded to come to Britain to complete work on the Oxford Icelandic-English dictionary. He settled in Oxford in 1866,

⁴⁴ Müller's original patron in Britain, and the arch-enemy of the German revolutionary exiles, was the Prussian scholar and ambassador Baron von Bunsen. Bunsen was well known in Britain for his historicist Biblical criticism and his promotion of Niebuhr's ideas on Roman history, which influenced Victorian historiography.

whence he poured a steady stream of saga editions and papers on philology, Norse history and Germanic literature. His magnum opus, the *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* (1883), made it into the libraries of British popularizers of Old Norse culture such as William Morris. Eiríkur Magnússon moved to Britain for work on a new Icelandic version of the Bible produced by the British and Foreign Bible Society, and went on to translate Icelandic folk-tales and publish papers on runology, the Elder Edda, and the history of the first Commonwealth. He also collaborated with William Morris on his saga translations and on the six-volume *Saga Library*, which aimed to make medieval Icelandic literature known to a larger public. Working as Vigfússon's counterpart at Cambridge University, he helped to introduce Old Icelandic into the Anglo-Saxon Tripos.

Such interventions were intentional and far-reaching, but sometimes immigrants' contributions were merely the inadvertent result of trying to make a living doing the only thing educated foreigners knew how – teaching their own languages, literatures and histories. Most of these accidental teachers spent their lives in drudgery as private tutors, examiners, crammers, or part-time lecturers, but a few Italians (such as Gabriele Rossetti, father of Dante and Christina, or Antonio Panizzi, principal librarian at the British Museum) and German refugees in the next generation managed to acquire more stable positions. Indian immigrants and Jewish immigrants from Germany and Eastern Europe also occasionally found employment as professors, lecturers, librarians or cataloguers at the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge and London or the British Museum, where they could apply their knowledge of ancient languages, Hindu law, rabbinical literature, and Indian or Near Eastern history.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ For numerous examples of European Jews in these positions see Werner E. Mosse, ed., *Second Chance: Two Centuries of German-speaking Jews in the United Kingdom* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1991), and Panikos Panayi, ed., *Germans in Britain since 1500* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1996). But Judaica was not the only focus of interest among Jewish immigrants. After the turn of the century the imperialist German-Jewish magnate Alfred Beit provided funds for the chair of colonial history at Oxford, and for increased library holdings in the subject.

Some foreigners even occupied academic positions in ‘native’ subjects.⁴⁶ The historian and jurist Paul Vinogradoff had been visiting England from 1883 to research feudal land law, and was friends with leading medievalists and jurists such as Henry Maine, Frederic Seebohm, and F. W. Maitland, who marvelled at the Russian’s mastery of English history.⁴⁷ From the 1890s Vinogradoff’s work on English feudal institutions appeared in English historical journals and Oxford University Press monographs; later he became editor of the British Academy’s *Records of English Economic and Social History*. Vinogradoff finally settled in Oxford in 1901 and after a distinguished career was buried in one of the university’s churchyards; the inscription on his tomb read: ‘*Hospitae Britanniae gratus advena* [a grateful foreigner to his host Britannia].’⁴⁸ The same may have been inscribed on Friedrich Max Müller’s neighbouring gravestone, and on those of many other immigrant scholars.

6. SEARCHING FOR A PAST: REVERSE MIGRATION AND THE CONSUMPTION OF HISTORY

Such scholars were an exception. Most immigrants – whether exiles ejected on pain of death or imprisonment from their homelands, or economic migrants voluntarily seeking a better life or

⁴⁶ In 1852 Gottfried Kinkel was nearly appointed to the Chair of English Language and Literature at University College, London that went in the end to David Masson (his referees were impressed by his knowledge of Shakespeare, see Ashton, *Little Germany*, p. 156).

⁴⁷ It is interesting to compare the writings of a feudal historian such as Vinogradoff, who turned to British medieval history partly for the light it could cast on Russia’s handling of peasant emancipation, with the writings of socialist populists from Herzen to Stepniak, who envisioned a Russian socialist future as a fusion of native agrarian community and Western ideas purged of their individualism and materialism.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Peter Stein, ‘Vinogradoff, Sir Paul Gavrilovitch (1854–1925)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36664>> [accessed 8 December 2017].

scope for their professional endeavours – did not make their way to Victorian Britain out of any particular interest in British history, love of the country or desire to make their home there. But there was one national subgroup that did just that: those white American expatriates who came to Britain searching for a missing (and largely imaginary) past, a lost tradition which they could not find in the United States. As the American novelist Henry James wrote, ‘My choice is the Old World – my choice, my need, my life.’⁴⁹ If the ‘Old Country’ for most immigrants signified the home they had left behind across the waves, for this subsection of white Americans it was Britain itself – and they were enacting their own ‘myth of return.’ They came by choice; they could go back any time they wished; they were generally not on an ideological crusade, nor straitened in means; and far from avoiding the host society, at least some of them came with the purpose of making it their own. Artists, writers and intellectuals joined tourists and sightseers, and the American heiresses who married bankrupt aristocrats, in the consumption of the British past. Language – the main stumbling block for the European foreigner – was not a problem, and no colour or ethnic prejudice such as the Indian or black English speakers had to face stood in their way. They could fit in more easily than other immigrants: the late-Victorian derisive attitude to the vulgar American ‘barbarian’ did not put up the same barriers to integration as did the handicaps of colour or language.⁵⁰ Many Anglophile Indian students in the latter part of century also came in search of an authentic British life and culture, drawing, like the Americans, on their knowledge and love of English literature and history for idealised images of what they would encounter there. But disillusion quickly followed for the colonials, and aesthetic appreciation of

⁴⁹ Henry James, *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. by Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers (New York, NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 214.

⁵⁰ Henry James described his compatriots ‘looming up – dim, vast, portentous – in their millions – like gathering waves – the barbarians of the Roman Empire’ (James, *Complete Notebooks*, p. 126).

British culture had to struggle against abhorrence of British rule.⁵¹ The Americans, though, were no longer ruled by Britain, and were free to indulge in sentimental fancies, especially when money and letters of introduction oiled the exercises in cultural immersion. Britain was semi-familiar and Americans were simultaneously insiders and outsiders: for Conrad Aiken, an Edwardian expatriate, England was ‘the window which looked into his own racial and cultural past, and thus bestowed upon him the sense of belonging, of being part of a moving continuum, the evolving series of civilized consciousness.’⁵² They came in order to turn public history into private identity, to create memories out of borrowed pasts, to rediscover ‘origins.’ Like genealogists such as Horatio Gates Somerby, who made careers tracing the British pedigrees of aspiring Americans, these expatriates sought out a heritage they could make their own.

After residing in England for several years at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Washington Irving constructed a picturesque, romantic image of the country, full of ruins, ancient customs and aged relics of the past; and this famous portrait from *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon* (1819) persisted tenaciously in some quarters for the next eighty years. In 1899 Stephen Crane, the naturalist novelist famous for *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), rented a baronial manor house in Sussex, which had a ghost and a suitably medieval atmosphere, but no modern conveniences. Friends called him ‘Baron Brede,’ for, as Edward Garnett later recalled, ‘the lure of romance [had] always thrilled Crane’s blood, and Brede Place had had indeed, an unlucky, chequered history.’⁵³ Other expatriates who rushed to buy medieval country houses included the Pre-Raphaelite-influenced painter Edwin Austin Abbey, who specialised in Shakespearean and Arthurian subjects, and Francis Hodgson Burnett, the English-born

⁵¹ See Shompa Lahiri, *Indians in Britain: Anglo-Indian Encounters, Race and Identity, 1880-1930* (London: Frank Cass, 2000).

⁵² Quoted in Stanley Weintraub, *The London Yankees: Portraits of American Writers and Artists in England, 1894-1914* (London: W. H. Allen, 1979), p. 5.

⁵³ Quoted in Weintraub, *London Yankees*, p. 160.

American children's writer, who moved back to England in the mid-1890s to embark on a series of historical novels. Like Crane, the painter Francis D. Millet, who settled in Britain in 1884, had to restore the old country houses he lived in and used as sets for his seventeenth-century English genre scenes. In his small way he contributed to the campaigns for the preservation of the British architectural heritage that were taking off in the late nineteenth century. Some did not need to restore old houses, however: they could build them. William Waldorf Astor, one of the richest men in America and an aspiring aristocrat, moved to Britain in the early 1890s and immediately purchased the Cliveden estate of the Duke of Westminster. He filled it with medieval weapons, Tudor prayer books, Roman marbles and balustrades transported whole from Italy.⁵⁴ He then hired the church architect J.L. Pearson to build Astor House, his London estate office, in the style of a Tudor mansion. The House was a potpourri featuring Gothic timberwork and carvings of characters from an eclectic collection of legends, historical novels, and different historical periods. In 1903 Astor purchased and restored a thirteenth-century castle, on whose grounds he erected a mock-Tudor village.

Astor was a prime example of someone who ransacked the treasure house of world history indiscriminately in order to fill a perceived cultural lacuna, but others were more focused and consistent in their choice of borrowed pasts. Unlike the communities of European immigrants and exiles who tended to settle in the centres and suburbs of the major cities, the artistic American expatriates often preferred rural dwellings and picturesque villages, precisely for their sense of English heritage, and as an exercise in what Richard Kenin has called 'consciously lived nostalgia.'⁵⁵ It need hardly be said that this was nostalgia of a very different kind from that indulged in by European refugees: for the Americans Britain represented the romantic past, not

⁵⁴ See Richard Kenin, *Return to Albion: Americans in England, 1760–1940* (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), pp. 196–97.

⁵⁵ Kenin, *Return to Albion*, p. 115.

the alien present; it was itself the object of longing. Henry James, who made his home in the country in 1876, described the ‘very old English village’ of Broadway where the colony of American painters including Millet and Abbey resided in the 1880s as ‘the perfection of the old English rural tradition.’ Its ‘old nooks and old objects,’ its ‘vista’ of ‘cottages, thatched, latticed, mottled, mended, ivied, immemorial,’ its ‘old garden[s] with old gates and old walls and old summer-houses [...] the old-fashioned flowers,’ the ‘arms’ of an ‘old family’ – were all things guaranteed to ‘charm’ ‘American eyes.’⁵⁶ In an early essay in *English Hours: A Portrait of a Country*, he wrote from a self-consciously sentimental ‘American point of view’ of the appeal of English ‘conservatism’ with its ‘traditions’ and ‘associations,’ and regretted the ‘ruthless’ renovations of the Gothic revival architect Gilbert Scott, which tampered with the ‘hoary substance’ of Chester cathedral, ‘the red sandstone of the primitive structure, darkened and devoured by time.’⁵⁷ Like Irving generations earlier, James was looking in the landscape, history and architecture of England for an embodiment of tradition, which consisted, in his famous listing, of ‘castles,’ ‘old country-houses,’ ‘thatched cottages,’ ‘ivied ruins,’ and ‘little Norman churches.’⁵⁸

In the writing and art of many American expatriates, the British past took shape as an open-air ‘museum’ of the picturesque,⁵⁹ but there were those among them who regarded such romantic mythmaking and tradition-mongering with self-conscious irony. Bret Harte, author of Old West stories set in a gold-rush Californian past who moved permanently to Britain in the 1880s, ‘poked fun at English reverence for old buildings and even ruins, and for coats of arms and family crests’;⁶⁰ and Mark Twain, who chose London as his temporary base in 1896 after the

⁵⁶ Henry James, ‘Our Artists in Europe’, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 79, June 1889, 50–66 (pp. 50, 52–3).

⁵⁷ Henry James, *English Hours: A Portrait of a Country*, 1905 (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2011), pp. 43, 42, 41.

⁵⁸ Henry James, *Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*, ed. by Leon Edel and Mark Wilson (New York, NY: Library of America, 1984), pp. 351–52.

⁵⁹ James, ‘Our Artists’, p. 52.

⁶⁰ Weintraub, *London Yankees*, p. 47.

death of his daughter, aimed the barbs of his wit at English and American sentimentalists alike. Describing a family hotel in a letter to a friend in 1900, he invoked satirically a whole palette of English pasts:

Family Hotels [...] are a London specialty [...] they are ramshackle clubs which were dwellings at the time of the Heptarchy [...] All the modern inconveniences are furnished, and some that have been obsolete for a century [...] They exist upon a tradition; they represent the vanishing home-like inn of fifty years ago, and are mistaken by foreigners for it. Some quite respectable Englishmen still frequent them through inherited habit and arrested development; many Americans also, through ignorance and superstition. The rooms are as interesting as the Tower of London, but older I think. Older and dearer. The lift was a gift of William the Conqueror, some of the beds are prehistoric. They represent geological periods. Mine is the oldest. It is formed in strata of Old Red Sandstone, volcanic tufa, ignis fatuus, and bicarbonate of hornblende, superimposed upon argillaceous shale, and contains the prints of prehistoric man.⁶¹

All the periods of history: from the (pseudo)geological and the prehistoric to the Anglo-Saxon, from the Norman to the mid-Victorian, are to be found here in a museum-like display, but they are ruses to entrap the tradition-hunting American, not picturesque inspirations. Twain was no stranger to the appeal the British past held for an ‘innocent’ American abroad, but like the Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur’s court, he could not help but view this past through the lens

⁶¹ Mark Twain, *Mark Twain’s Letters*, ed. by Albert Bigelow Paine, 2 vols. (New York, NY: Gabriel Wells, 1923), II: pp. 700–701.

of a cynical present. After being introduced by the Archdeacon Wilberforce to a ‘clairvoyant’ from Bristol who claimed to have discovered the Holy Grail, Twain remarked:

this was the very vessel which was brought by night and secretly delivered to Nicodemus, nearly nineteen centuries ago [...] the very cup which the stainless Sir Galahad had sought with knightly devotion in far fields of peril and adventure in Arthur’s time, fourteen hundred years ago [...] and here it was at last, dug up by a grain-broker at no cost of blood or travel, and apparently no purity required of him above the average purity of the twentieth-century dealer in cereal futures.⁶²

Twain dictated these words in 1907, striking the keynote of ironic deflation that would come to characterize many twentieth-century attitudes to the past.

Irony, of course, is the one ingredient missing from nearly all the migrant perspectives detailed in this essay. Herzen could afford to be ironic at the expense of the other exiles, but where his own exile was concerned – alone on the cold Primrose Hill side, ‘cut off from the whole world by distance, fog, and [his] own will’ – irony had no place. ‘Everything has changed around me: the Thames flows by instead of the Moskva River, and an alien tribe is by me... and no road leads back home....’⁶³ However widely they differed in other respects, nostalgic memory and public history were both defined by their earnestness in relation to the past. Irony dissolves the foundations upon which identity – whether personal, national, or political – can be built; but once their feet touched the shifting sands of British life, refugee, revolutionary, artist and scholar alike had to direct their efforts to the consolidation of those foundations. Perhaps the only safe

⁶² Quoted in Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain: A Biography*, 4 vols. (New York, NY: Gabriel Wells, 1923), IV: p. 1388.

⁶³ Herzen, *Byloe*, I: pp. 4, 6.

generalization one can make about the time travelling migrants who have featured in this essay is this: for them the past was no laughing matter.

7. CONCLUSION

But if generalizations are not possible, general conclusions are. Faced with different places of origin, different degrees of agency behind the decision to migrate, different economic and class status and degrees and kinds of participation in the host society, different politics and ideologies, we can still pinpoint certain practices, conditions and attributes that cut across this variety. To a certain extent these are common to all engagements with the past, immigrant and ‘native,’ but the two this conclusion will focus on – return via reconstruction and audience-orientation – acquire in migrant experience a unique spatial dimension.

The architectural and artistic reconstructions of American expatriates, the social reconstruction of home institutions and community networks by groups of European economic migrants and refugees, and the accompanying rhetorical reconstructions of past cultural strata by all these groups, were directly premised on the principle of return. Even the ideologues and activists who were more interested in constructing the future, national or universal, than in reconstructing the past, felt compelled to return to old radical movements or civic glories of days gone by before they could move forward into new territories of history. Crucially, this return was not just to a different time, but to a different place. The past had not only been left behind – in the mists of history or within living memory – but had also occurred elsewhere, in a different part of the earth from the one where the immigrant now lived or the one where he had been born. The Americans enacted this return literally, by coming to Britain; the Europeans symbolically, by recreating pieces of their homelands in the host country. But either way, the bridging of the geographical distance was as central to the migrant project of reconstruction as the bridging of the temporal one.

Reconstruction has always been inherently dialogical and interactive; common to all its varieties is what may be called audience-orientation. Experiences of the past are never just about personal subjectivity: there must be an addressee, another subjectivity to which the reconstructive impulse can be directed and from which it can receive its recognition. The temporal mummification of the revolutionary exiles critiqued by Johanna Kinkel, Herzen and Marx occurred in an explicitly communal context. It was in group gatherings and debates, and in collective commemoration ceremonies, however small, that revolutionary ‘memory’ was constituted and reinforced. Though a gulf separated the private recriminations of those greying 48ers from the public ‘history’ teaching, in print or in the lecture hall, aimed at British constituencies by assimilated university professors (or the mainstream publications and speeches of *fin de siècle* revolutionaries like Kropotkin), both forms of past consciousness depended upon external validation for their existence. The greying 48ers had their own lecture audiences and their own, non-English-language, newspapers, not to mention letters and memoirs, in which the politics of their memories could be played out. Even the striking immigrant tailor, who left no written trace of his own voice to be recuperated from the archive, became a mute testament to historical process for the readership of the Yiddish anarchist press of 1889. At the other end of the social and economic spectrum, the houses built or rented by Astor and Crane, the paintings of Millet and the articles of Henry James all acquired their meaning as reconstructions of and commentaries on the past from the appreciative or mocking eye of the beholder.

But just as with the desire to return, there was a specifically immigrant dimension to this audience-orientation that was not shared by native British varieties of memorial and historical practice. The immigrants could never achieve, like the British on their native soil, total identity between historian and audience, or the spatial continuity between past and present encapsulated in the phrase ‘we are where we were.’ If for the British time and space coincided – my past is here, others’ past is elsewhere – for the immigrant, time and space were forever dissociated. The immigrants’ past was not here, the past here was not theirs, it belonged to

others – to make it theirs was to appropriate it, to superimpose one past upon another. Whomever a past originally ‘belonged’ to, themselves or their hosts or third parties, the immigrants’ interaction with it was always undertaken in awareness of multiple audiences, spaces and identities, at the interface of at least two, and frequently more, national communities. The degree of engagement with those multiple audiences varied enormously, but their presence was a fact of every immigrant’s life. There would always be someone (in their own national communities or in the ‘host’ society) for whom the past they spoke of or the memories they shared were foreign, for whom ‘us’ were in fact ‘them,’ and vice versa. There could never be a unitary ‘we.’ And whether they turned memories into histories or histories into memories, whether they assimilated successfully or refused to integrate, immigrants could never claim exclusive ownership of the pasts they reconstructed on foreign soil. Was the ‘right’ of the Americans, Germans or Indians to redeploy British history for their own purposes identical to the ‘right’ of the British to their own island story? Could the attempts of the French, the Poles or the Italians to keep alive the flame of their memory for their own compatriots ever take place without deciding first whether to shut out or invite in the ‘alien tribe’ that surrounded them? Such questions cannot be answered without raising the spectres of authenticity and appropriation. And this is why the experience of the Victorian immigrant rightly belongs at the heart not just of the investigation of Victorians’ uses of their own and others’ pasts, but of the broader academic and political debates about historical ownership and identity.

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